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SUN-CULT AND MEGALITHS IN OCEANIA

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THERE is at present no decisive evidence that the sun was the object of a public religious cult in any part of Polynesia.

Roggeveen and his companions¹ observed the inhabitants of Easter island prostrating themselves towards the rising sun, but as these prostrations seem to have had some relation to the stone statues of the island, it would be dangerous to conclude that the sun was the object towards which the prostrations were directed.

Similarly, Gill² speaks of an "ancient solar cult" in Mangaia, but it is doubtful whether this is more than an inference from the mode of orientation of the dead which probably arises directly out of the belief in the direction of the home of the dead and only corresponds with the direction of the sun if this home lie either east or west.³

While there is thus no direct evidence of any cult of the sun in Polynesia, there are features of the ritual of the Areoi organization of eastern Polynesia which point to its essential purpose having been closely associated with the sun.

The Areois were outwardly bands of strolling players and

¹ See Behrens, *Reise durch die Süd-Länder und um die Welt*, 1737, Leipzig, p. 83 (Translated as an Appendix to "Voyage of Captain Don Felipe Gonzalez," *Hakluyt Soc.*, Second series, No. 13, Cambridge, 1908, p. 133; for another account, see *The World Displayed*, London, 1773, Vol. IX, p. 120).

² *Life in the Southern Isles*, London, 1876, p. 75.

³ Cf. W. J. Perry, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1914, XLIV, 281.

chartered libertines who are best known to ethnologists through their practice of infanticide, it being a condition of entrance into the society that with certain exceptions no child of a member should be allowed to survive its birth. This practice of infanticide and the licentious character of the festivals have attracted the attention of those who have described the societies to such a degree that with one exception they have neglected or overlooked the beliefs and practices which evidently formed the essential purpose of the societies. There can be little doubt that the features which have hitherto attracted so much attention are only superficial, perhaps only recent, additions to a ritual which had a deep and truly religious purpose.

The practice of infanticide was confined to the Areois of the Society islands and seems to have been wholly absent in other groups such as the Marquesas. Even in Tahiti it was probably a late growth, a special development of the practice of infanticide as it existed widely throughout Polynesia.¹ Similarly, the licentious dances and representations of the Areois were limited to the lowest rank of the societies and seem even among them to have been only a fair sample of the morals of the people as a whole.²

In seeking for the deeper meaning of the societies, the first point to note is the resemblance to the secret organizations found in other parts of Oceania. Each Areoi society contained seven ranks or grades, and the processes of initiation into the society and of raising in rank³ were of a kind closely similar to those of the secret societies of Melanesia. The first object of this paper is to show that this resemblance is more than superficial and proceeds from a fundamental similarity in the purpose and ritual of the different organizations.

In Tahiti, whence most of our accounts of the Areois have come, the festive proceedings of the societies were almost continuous, and no features of the ritual have come down to us which give any indication of a deeper meaning. In the Marquesas and some

¹ See Moerenhout, *Voyages aux îles du grand Océan*, Paris, 1837, I, 500.

² Moerenhout, *op. cit.*, I, 498.

³ Moerenhout, *op. cit.*, p. 491; Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, I, 211 et seq.

of the Society islands, however, the active life of the Areois was limited to a portion of the year, and it is this limitation which shows the true meaning of the ritual.¹ In the Marquesas, the Areois were inactive during the season of the year when the sun was north of the equator and came out of their retirement in October to celebrate by means of a festival the return of Mahui,² the god who brings fertility and abundance, and is, according to Moerenhout, a personification of the sun. About the time of the southern solstice in December there was a second festival, the chief feature of which was the offering of first-fruits to Mahui. The activity of the Areois came to an end in April or May, the exact date varying with the locality and climate. At this time the god was believed to go to Po, the obscure and dark home of the dead, and the members betook themselves to their *marae* or sacred enclosures to pray for the return of the god from this land of obscurity to Rohoutou noanoa, the home of light and life and the proper abode of the gods. From this time until the following October the Areois were in retreat; they suspended all their amusements and bemoaned the absence of the god until the time came to celebrate his return anew at the following equinox. There can be little question that we have here a ritual celebration of the annual death of the sun and of its coming to life again to bring abundance and fertility. The Areois of the Gambier islands had festivals at the equinoxes in October and April which show that the societies must have had a purpose and meaning similar to those of the Marquesans.³

There can be little doubt that the celebration of the sun must once also have been the purpose of the Areois of Tahiti. The place of the Marquesan god Mahui is taken in Tahiti by Oro, and, though it is only in some of the Society islands that the celebrations of the Areois had any seasonal character, it is probable that Oro was also a sun-god, and that it is only by the exaggeration of the

¹ Moerenhout, *op. cit.*, p. 501-2.

² The connection of Mahui with the Maui of other parts of Polynesia is doubtful, but their identification is supported by many features of the history of Maui which suggest the personification of the sun.

³ Moerenhout, I, 110.

pleasure-seeking aspect of the societies and the accretion of the practice of infanticide that the true character of the ritual has been obscured.

If now we turn to the secret societies of Melanesia, we find evidence pointing clearly to the seasonal character of their celebrations and to the possibility that they represent the annual birth and death of the sun. Just as it is the external and obvious features of the Areoi societies which have absorbed the attention of ethnologists in the eastern Pacific, so is it certain obvious and external features which have almost exclusively attracted their attention in New Britain. We have abundant accounts of the dances and masks, and of the functions of the societies as associations by means of which one section of the community acquires wealth by terrorization and blackmail, but among all the accounts I have only found one to record a feature which furnishes the clue to the deeper meaning of these societies. The Rev. R. H. Rickard tells us¹ that the Dukduk, which is one of the two chief objects of the ritual of the society, dies annually at one season of the year and comes to life again at another. We have here an annual representation of the birth, life, and death of some mysterious being. We know of nothing in the ritual of these societies which points to the sun as the being so represented. We have only the seasonal character of the celebration, and when we examine this in detail we find that it differs from the annual celebration of the Marquesas in that the death of the Dukduk takes place at the beginning of the northwest monsoon and the new birth at its end, the period of activity of the Dukduk thus corresponding approximately with that of the retirement of the Areois.

While there is thus no direct evidence that the function of the Dukduk societies is to celebrate the annual birth and death of the sun, there is evidence of rites connected with the sun in a neighboring part of New Britain.

In one district of the island of Vuatom, in the island of Vurar, and at one place on the mainland of New Britain, a festival takes place when the sun has reached the southern limit of its course.²

¹ *Proc. Roy. Soc. Victoria*, 1891, III, 75.

² O. Meyer, *Anthropos*, 1908, III, 700 and J. Meier, *Anthropos*, 1912, VIII, 706.

In this festival, which lasts for three days, offerings of the fruits of the earth are made to the sun, and rites are performed which are believed to keep the sun in its proper course. It is clear that it is the annual course of the sun which determines the performance of the rites, for this takes place at the time when the sun reaches its southernmost point as determined by its position in relation to certain hills. The offerings of food which appear to be first-fruits also point to a close resemblance with the leading motive of the celebrations of the Areoi. On the other hand, the rites of Vuatom have features such as the rigorous exclusion of women and the plundering of gardens which form points of resemblance with Melanesian secret societies.

The people of the district where the sun is thus celebrated have certain characteristics of language which show them to be distinct from their neighbors. It would seem as if they practise, as part of their general religious cult, a rite which in neighboring regions of New Britain has become part of a secret ritual.

We have evidence of the importance of the sun in the religion of another part of the Bismarck archipelago. In the more northern parts of New Ireland an object called *oara* is made to represent the sun rising out of the sea, and at the end of the rites this object is burnt together with the skull of a dead man which has been dug up soon after interment.¹ It is probably more than a coincidence that the masks of the Dukduk should also be burnt on the day when the annual death of this being is celebrated.

The evidence that the celebration of the birth, life, and death, of the Dukduk represents the annual changes of the sun is thus indirect and conjectural. It will become more probable, however, if it is possible to find any connection with the sun in the ritual of the secret societies of other parts of Melanesia. Passing southward, societies called Rukruk similar to the Dukduk of New Britain exist in northern Bougainville. We know very little about their customs, but one obvious feature is the wearing of peculiar headdresses which often have a globular form. In the south of

¹ Krämer-Bannow, *Zeit. d. Gesell. f. Erdkunde*, Berlin, 1911, p. 21.

Bougainville the sun forms a prominent object in the decorative art.¹

In the British Solomon islands secret societies called Matambala formerly existed in Florida, and here we have definite evidence of the seasonal character of the celebrations.² They began in the month when the canarium nuts ripen, which form one of the staple foods of the people, and the gathering of nuts to be offered as first-fruits formed the opening rite in the ceremonial. At the end of the proceedings, which seem to have lasted for several months, the masks were burnt as in the Dukduk ceremonies of New Britain. In the course of the celebrations houses were built so sacred that it is said not even men might enter them, and among the objects which these houses contained were images of the sun and moon.

While there is thus evidence that the sun was an object of importance in the ritual of the Matambala societies, we have no direct evidence that their purpose was to celebrate the annual course of the sun. Indeed, the fact that the ceremonies only took place at intervals of several years shows that, if the annual celebration of the course of the sun was once the object of the rites, they had departed very widely from their original purpose.

Another region of Melanesia which is characterized by the presence of secret societies is that comprising the Banks and Torres islands and the northern New Hebrides. Here the rites have no obvious seasonal character, and there is nothing which at first sight raises a suspicion that the ritual may be in any way connected with the annual course of the sun. Nevertheless, there are features which are seen to fit in with such a purpose as soon as the possibility is suggested. The people of Mota in the Banks islands speak of the birth or death of a *tamate*, the mask or other object which acts as the badge of a Tamate or ghost society. One *tamate* is said to have been born at the door of a *gamal* or clubhouse, while a rite in which the image of a dragon-fly is burnt

¹ Thurnwald, *Forschungen auf den Salomo-Inseln u. d. Bismarck-Archipel*, Berlin, 1912, Bd. i, Tafel XII; also *Ethnopsychologische Studien an Südseevölkern*, Leipzig, 1913, Tafel XXI.

² Codrington, *The Melanesians*, 1891, p. 95; also Ray, *Zeitsch. f. afrikan. u. ozean. Sprachen*, 1897, III, 214.

after the initiation of a new member into the dragon-fly society is said to represent the death of the *tamate*. These expressions point to the representation of the birth, life, and death of the *tamate* as one of the purposes of the secret ritual, and there are so many points of resemblance with the ritual of the Dukduk of New Britain as to leave little doubt that they are manifestations of one and the same culture. It is thus suggested that the representation of the birth, life, and death of the *tamate* in the Banks islands may have had its origin in the idea of the representation of the annual birth, life, and death of the sun.

The number of Tamate societies in the Banks islands is very great, but there is one known as the Tamate liwoa or great Tamate, the leading position of which makes it probable that, if any one of the societies is to be associated with the sun, it would be this. There is one feature of the ritual of the Tamate liwoa which suggests relation with the sun. An important feature of initiation into this society is the use of six stakes by means of which the novice advances as he approaches the spot where the special secret of the society is to be revealed to him, and these six stakes form a line from east to west. The ritual of which we know, forms only a small proportion of the whole, and a more complete record may show other features of this kind.

More striking, however, than any correspondence in ritual is a similarity in the traditions of origin of the Tamate liwoa and the Areois of Tahiti. The Polynesian societies are said to have been founded as the result of the visit to earth of the god Oro who married a maiden of the earth named Vairaumati, and tradition connects the origin of Tamate liwoa with a supernatural visitor named Wetmatliwo who married a maiden of high rank in the island of Vanua Lava. A great light which filled the house when this person was shown to his wife's parents and his final disappearance by sinking into the earth suggest that Wetmatliwo was a personification of the sun. One point of similarity in detail is that while the Tahitian Oro visited his earthly wife by means of a rainbow, a rainbow was also seen by the maiden of the Banks islands when Wetmatliwo first appeared in her village.

There are other features of the secret organizations of the Banks islands which suggest a connection with the sun, but this evidence is so scattered and fragmentary that if it were not for the obvious connection of the Tamate ritual with that of the Dukduk no great importance could have been attached to it. It is only the combination of the evidence from the secret rituals of New Britain, the Solomon, and Banks islands which enables us to conclude that one of the purposes of this ritual was the celebration of the annual course of the sun by the anthropomorphic simile of birth and death.

The similarity of the ritual of the secret societies of four different parts of Oceania raises the problem which faces the ethnologist at every turn of his path whether he has to do with independent origin or with community of culture. In the case before us the resemblances in detail are so close, and the connection of the cultures of which the secret societies form part so obvious, that I do not suppose there will be any who will venture to put forward the plea of independent origin. The most that could be said from this point of view is that the similarities in belief and practice of the people of the Marquesas and Tahiti, the Banks islands, the Solomon islands, and New Britain in this respect are the outcome of some definite idea common to these peoples, not merely as part of the general furniture of the human mind, but through some cultural element common to the different peoples.

I propose, however, to leave such a vague possibility on one side and to assume with confidence that the ideas and practices found in these four parts of Oceania have a common source. The question next to be considered is whether the common source whence the four sets of ideas and practices have been derived is to be placed within or without the limits of Oceania. Are these elements of culture the result of a development which has taken place in some part of Oceania and radiated thence to the places where they are now found, or have they been transported from some other part of the world to the Bismarck archipelago, the Solomon islands, southern Melanesia, and eastern Polynesia? I believe that there is one feature of the beliefs and practices which makes it possible to answer this question.

We have been led by the comparison of the secret societies of the four regions to conclude that the central idea underlying them is the representation of the annual course of the sun by means of the anthropomorphic processes of birth and death. All four regions are in the tropics. New Britain is only about five and the Marquesas and the Solomons only about ten to twelve degrees south of the Equator; such annual movements of the sun as take place in these regions would not be likely to suggest the birth and death of a human being or of an anthropomorphic god. The annual movements of the sun in the equatorial belt are associated with change in the prevailing direction of the wind and in the amount of the rainfall, and consequently with the luxuriance of vegetation, but the changes in the luminosity and heat-giving power of the sun are not sufficiently great to suggest a simile with birth and death; nor does it seem likely that the annual changes in the position of the sun would have become the sign for the practices of special religious rites unless there had been some extraneous source which would have led the people to attend to these changes and charged them with such emotional tone as to make them the motive for religious rites. The representation of the sun's annual movements by the events of birth and death becomes much more easy to understand if the idea were brought to these tropical regions from a latitude where the representation would have a real meaning and be concordant with the behavior of the sun.

If, then, the central idea underlying the ritual of the Areoi, Dukduk, Matambala, and Tamate societies be the representation of the sun's movements by the simile of birth, life, and death, we are driven to the view that the idea and the resulting cult must have been introduced into Oceania by a people who came from some latitude where the simile would have a meaning. There can be little question that such a latitude must be placed in the northern hemisphere for, if we except the southern part of South America and perhaps the south of New Zealand, there is no part of the southern hemisphere which could have been the home of such an idea.

This cult of the sun forms part of a secret ritual confined to

men and associated in at least three of the four places with a cult of dead ancestors. I show elsewhere¹ that the secret cults of Melanesia embody in a more or less pure form the religious practices of an immigrant people. I do not propose to consider the evidence for this here. I must be content to point out that the considerations now brought forward only serve to confirm a conclusion reached by the general study of the secret organizations of Melanesia.

The conclusion so far reached is that the secret rituals of Oceania which have the sun as their object belong to an immigrant culture which has come from a widely distant part of the world. I have now to consider whether it is possible that this same people may also have been the architects of the stone buildings and images which form so great a mystery of the islands of the Pacific.

Here again I will begin with eastern Polynesia. The Areoi societies held their celebrations in an enclosure called *marae* or *marai* at one end of which was situated a pyramidal structure with steps leading to a platform on which were placed the images of the gods during the religious celebrations of the people. The *marae* was used for religious ceremonial unconnected with the Areoi societies, but there seems to be no doubt that the Areois were of especial importance in connection with it. In the pyramid of the *marae* we have one of the best examples of the megalithic architecture of Polynesia. One such pyramid in the western part of the island of Tahiti was 267 feet in length and 87 feet in breadth at the base. All were built of large stones without cement, but so carefully shaped that they fitted together closely and formed durable structures.²

In the Marquesas, another home of the Areois, there were platforms similarly constructed a hundred yards in length, and many of them shaped and closely fitting blocks of which these structures were composed were as much as eight feet in length.³ On these platforms were pyramidal "altars" and they were surrounded by enormous upright stones.⁴ This association of the

¹ *The History of Melanesian Society*, Cambridge, 1914.

² Captain Cook's *Journal*, London, 1893, p. 83.

³ Porter, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean*, New York, 1822, II, 38.

⁴ Clavel, *Les Marquisiens*, Paris, 1885, p. 69.

distribution of the Areois with the presence of megalithic structures suggests that the immigrants to whom I have ascribed the cult of the sun may also have been the people who introduced the art of building the stone structures which have so greatly excited the wonder of visitors to Polynesia.

The part of the Pacific ocean where these stone structures have reached their acme in size and complexity is the Caroline islands. If there be anything in my hypothesis, we should expect here also to find manifestations of the religious ideas of those who founded the Areoi societies, and they are not lacking. In the Marianne or Ladrone islands there were associations of persons which seem to furnish an intermediate condition between the Areois of Tahiti and the occupants of the clubhouse of Melanesia.¹ We know very little about these associations, but their relation to the Areois of the east is shown clearly by the name they bore, Urritois or Ulitaos, which is merely another form of the Tahitian word, Areoi, the latter word having suffered the elision of a consonant so frequent in Polynesia. Similar associations flourished in the Carolines, and though we know still less of them than of the Urritois of the Ladrone, we can be confident that they had a similar character. Societies very closely related to the Areois thus existed in this region in conjunction with stone structures similar to those of eastern Polynesia.

There is a remarkable point of similarity between the traditions concerning the origins of these stone structures and of the Areoi societies of Tahiti. The ruins of Nan-matal on the east coast of Ponape in the Carolines are reputed to have been built by two brothers, Olochipa and Olochopa.² In the tradition of the foundation of the Areois of Tahiti, a very prominent part was taken by two brothers Orotetefa and Urutetefa.³ The interchanges between *r* and *l*, *t* and *ch* and *p* and *f* are so frequent in Oceania as to suggest that these two pairs of names are variants of one original, so that

¹ Le Gobien, *Histoires des Iles Mariannes*, Paris, 1770, p. 203; Freycinct, *Voyage autour du Monde*, 1829, II, 368, 370; Meinicke, *Die Inseln des stillen Oceans*, 1876, II, 407.

² Christian, *Caroline Islands*, London, 1899, p. 81.

³ Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 1829, I, 311; Moerenhout, *op. cit.*, I, 487.

we should have in the traditions of these two groups of islands nearly four thousand miles apart a most striking similarity of the names of pairs of brothers to whom prominent features of the culture are ascribed. In one case the brothers founded societies whose aim it was to celebrate the annual changes of the sun, while rude stone buildings were the handiwork of the others.

A recent account by Hambruch¹ shows that the resemblance between the Ponape and Tahiti names is not quite as close as would appear from previous records. Hambruch calls the two founders of the stone buildings, Sipe and Saupa but to put against this, he states that the place, Matolenim, where the structures were built, was formerly called *sau nalan* which means "the sun."

Though the resemblance in the names of the two culture heroes of Ponape and Tahiti is not as close as once seemed to be the case, it cannot be neglected. It may be that the two words have some meaning which would reduce the importance of the similarity, but taken in conjunction with the close resemblance of the names of the societies in the two places, it affords striking corroborative evidence supporting the conclusion suggested by the distribution of societies and monuments that both are the work of one people.

If the stone monuments and secret societies of Polynesia have had a common source, we should expect to find an association between the two elements of culture in Melanesia, and so it is. We know of stone structures in several parts of Melanesia, viz., the northern New Hebrides, Santa Maria in the Banks islands, Loh in the Torres islands, Ysabel in the Solomons, and Fiji.² The Banks and Torres islands and the northern New Hebrides are strongholds of the secret cults, and though the only island in the Solomons in which we know of the existence of secret societies is Florida, there is a definite tradition that this society came to Florida from Ysabel. The distribution of stone structures in Melanesia is just as it should be if the ghost societies and the stone buildings were the work of one and the same people.

The evidence for the connection of stone structures with secret

¹ Korr, *Bl. f. Anth., Ethnol. u. Urgesch.*, 1911, XLII, 121.

² See *History of Melanesian Society*, vol. II, p. 427.

societies is even more definite in Fiji. The Nanga societies of Viti Levu take this name from their meeting places, oblong enclosures, consisting of two or more compartments, surrounded by stone walls¹. The resemblance of these enclosures to the *marae* of Polynesia has struck more than one observer and the similarity extends to detail. At one end of each main compartment of the *nanga* there were truncated pyramids which served as platforms, evidently representatives of the pyramids of the *marae* of Tahiti measured by Captain Cook. Further, both *marae* and *nanga* were oriented with their long axes east and west, though the two differ in that the pyramids were at the western end of the *marae*² and at the eastern end of the *nanga*³.

There is thus a remarkable correspondence between the distribution of stone structures and secret societies in Oceania which points strongly, if not yet decisively, to the introducers of the secret cult of the sun having been the architects of the stone buildings which form one of the chief mysteries of the islands of the Pacific.

It is even possible that we may have here the clue to the greatest mystery of all, the great stone statues of Easter island. There is reason to suppose that these statues are not so unique as is often supposed. According to Moerenhout,⁴ similar statues, though not so large, exist in the islands of Pitcairn and Laivaivai; he believes that such colossal figures once existed in many other islands, but have been destroyed or have fallen into ruins. In the Marquesas and Society islands, also, stone figures in human form have been found which are sufficiently like those of the smaller and more eastward islands to suggest a common origin. Moerenhout believes that such stone figures and statues had a common meaning and were all representatives of beings called *tii* whose function it was to mark the limits of the sea and land, to maintain

¹ L. Fison, *Journ. Anth. Inst.*, 1885, XIV, 14; Joske, *Internat. Arch. f. Ethnog.*, 1889, II, 254; B. Thomson, *The Fijians*, 1908, p. 147.

² Captain Cook's *Journal*, 1803, p. 83.

³ A further point of resemblance between the *marae* and *nanga* is that both were the scene of offerings of first-fruits.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, I, 461.

harmony between the two elements and prevent their encroachment upon one another. I venture, though very diffidently, to extend the comparison. At one end of a clubhouse of Santa Maria in the Banks islands there are ancient stone figures which, in one respect at least, resemble the colossal statues of Easter island. In each instance the head is covered. This head-covering is very frequent in one variety of the representations of the human figure found throughout Melanesia, and is almost certainly connected with the importance of head-coverings in the ritual of the secret societies. It is therefore of interest that a head-covering should be a prominent feature of the statues of Easter island. Such a point of resemblance standing alone would have little significance, but taken in conjunction with the other correspondences and similarities pointed out in this paper, we must not ignore the possibility that we may have here only another expression of the art of the people I suppose to have introduced the cult of the sun into Oceania.

I cannot consider here how far it is possible to connect the stone work and sun-cult of Oceania with the megalithic monuments and sun-cults of other parts of the world. Megalithic monuments elsewhere are associated with a cult of the sun and the occurrence of this association in the islands of the Pacific ocean must serve to strengthen the position of those who hold that the art of building megalithic monuments has spread from one source. I must be content here to mention certain megalithic monuments of Polynesia which raise a difficulty.

The island of the Pacific which holds examples of megalithic structures most closely resembling those of other parts of the world is Tongatabu, where there are trilithic monuments so like those of Europe that the idea of a common source must rise to the mind of even the most strenuous advocate of independent origin. It is not possible at present to bring these monuments into relation with those of other parts of Oceania by connecting them with a cult of the sun, but Hambruch tells us that tradition points to the builders of the stonework of Ponape having come from Tonga. It may be that Tongatabu forms the intermediate

link between the stonework of the Carolines and the megalithic monuments of other parts of the world.

I have dealt elsewhere¹ with the relation between these Tongan monuments and the pyramids of other parts of Oceania, and have suggested that these two ancient forms of monument may be expressions of the ideas of two different streams of the megalithic culture. I cannot deal with this matter here; to do so would take me far beyond the relation of sun-cult and megaliths which is the subject of this article.

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¹ *History of Melanesian Society*, vol. II, p. 549.